

James Madison to Edmund Randolph, September 27, 1782. Partly in Cypher. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

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TO EDMUND RANDOLPH. 1

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1 From the Madison Papers (1840).

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- Philadelphia, September 24, 1782.

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Dear Sir, —The substance of the despatches brought by the French frigates, mentioned in my last, is, that Mr. Oswald first, and afterwards Mr. Grenville, had been deputed to Versailles on a pacific mission; that the latter was still (twenty-ninth of June) at Versailles; that his proposals, as to the point of independence, were at first equivocal, but at length more explicit; that he associated with the preliminary that the treaty of Paris, of 1763, should be the basis of the treaty in question; that as to this proposition he was answered, that as far as the treaty of '63 might be convenient for opening and facilitating a pacification, it would be admitted as a basis, but that it could not be admitted in any sense that should preclude His Most Christian Majesty from demanding such equitable arrangements as circumstances might warrant, and particularly in the East Indies and on the coast of Africa; that upon these grounds there was at first a prospect that negotiations would be opened with mutual sincerity, and be conducted to a speedy and happy issue; but that the success of the British navy in the West Indies had checked the ardor of the

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Ministry for peace, and that it was pretty evident they meant to spin out the negotiation till the event of the campaign should be decided. You will take notice that this is a recital from memory, and not a transcript of the intelligence.

The frigate L'Aigle, whose fate was not completely determined at the date of my last, we hear, has been raised by the enemy, and carried to New York. Captain De la Touche and the crew were made prisoners. Besides merchandize to a great value, nearly fifty thousand dollars were lost, most of which fell into the hands of the captors. The loss of this ship is to be the more regretted, as it appears that the two were particularly constructed, and destined for the protection of the trade of this country.

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Our Ally has added another important link to the chain of benefits by which this country is bound to France. He has remitted to us all the interest which he has paid for us, or was due to him on loans to us, together with all the charges attending the Holland loan; and has, moreover, postponed the demand of the principal till one year after the war, and agreed to receive it then in twelve successive annual payments. These concessions amount to a very considerable reduction of the liquidated debt. The fresh and large demand which we are about to make on him, will, I fear, be thought an unfit return for such favors. It could not, however, be avoided. The arrears to the army in January next will be upwards of six millions of dollars. Taxes cannot be relied on. Without money, there is some reason to surmise that it may be as difficult to disband an army as it has been to raise an army.

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My last informed you that Mr. Laurens had declined serving in the commission for peace. His proceedings, during his captivity, as stated by himself, are far from unexceptionable. Congress, nevertheless, were prevailed on to assent to a resolution informing him that his services could not be dispensed with. A few days after this resolution had passed, several numbers of the Parliamentary Register were received at the Office of Foreign Affairs, in

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one of which was published the enclosed petition. The petition was introduced by Mr. Burke, was a subject of some debate, and finally ordered to lie on the table. The extreme impropriety of a Representative of the United States addressing that very authority against which they had made war, in the language of the address, determined Mr. Jones and myself to move that the resolution above referred to should not be transmitted until the further order of Congress. In support of the motion it was observed, that however venial the fault might be in a private view, it evidently rendered Mr. Laurens no longer a fit depository for the public dignity and rights, which he had so far degraded; and that if Congress should reinstate him against his own desire, and with this fact before their eyes, it would seem as if they meant to ratify, instead of disowning, the degradation. The motion was opposed on two grounds—first, that the character of Mr. Laurens, and the silence of his letter, overbalanced the testimony of the Register, and rendered the fact incredible; secondly, that the fact, although faulty, ought to have no influence on the public arrangements. The first objection was the prevailing one. The second was abetted by but few. Several professed a readiness to renounce their friend, in case the authenticity of the paper should be verified. On the question there were five noes, three ayes, two divided, two half votes aye. The petition had been published some time ago at New York, and had made some noise in New Jersey, but was ultimately regarded as spurious. There are so many circumstances relating to this gentleman during his captivity, which speak a bias towards the British nation, and an undue cordiality with its new leaders, that I dread his participation in the work of peace.

Your favor of the seventh, which had not arrived last post-day, came a few days afterwards, the post having been detained by sickness. The subsequent one came to hand yesterday in due time. The expedient of drawing bills here on funds in Virginia, even the most unquestionable, has been often tried by us, but in vain. The balance is so much against Virginia that no one wants money there, and the evil will increase as the prospect of peace retires. Your credit with Mr. Cohen, which procured me fifty pounds, with two

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hundred dollars transmitted by Mr. Ambler, have been of much service to me, but I am relapsing fast into distress. The case of my brethren is equally alarming.

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As some of Mr. Laurens's friends strenuously maintain that the petition enclosed is spurious, I would not wish it to be made public through me until the matter be ascertained, or he be present to explain it.